

Solving RC downtown parking



Longtime problem finally getting solved, say city leaders

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Downtown parking has been a problem in Rapid City for many years. But the problem is being solved.

Despite a few setbacks, it soon won't be as much of a hassle for business owners and their employees or for families who want to do some shopping or enjoy a good meal, Rapid City leaders vow.

Mayor Alan Hanks said efforts by city staff working in tandem with business owners and local residents are showing promise. "I think we're making progress

but we have got a ways to go," Hanks said.

The biggest changes in the parking are the addition of the third level on the downtown parking ramp and a new downtown parking plan that calls for upgraded meters and longer parking periods the further from the core of downtown one gets.

The third level of the parking ramp is under construction and will be complete by the end of this year and will provide downtown with 164 additional parking spaces. To make parking easier for city and school district employees, the city acquired the empty lot across Fifth Street from the City/School Administration Center (C/SAC).

The lot, which was owned by the state, was turned

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into a 50-spot parking lot before the construction of the ramp began a few months ago.

The original downtown parking plan was introduced in April and has gone through a number of changes mostly suggested by members of the community who were concerned their businesses or neighborhoods would be affected negatively. The new plan, which was introduced in September, involved removing parking meters on Columbus and Quincy streets between Ninth Street and West Boulevard, changing the meters in front of the YMCA from two to four hours, changing the meters on Mount Rushmore Road south of Quincy Street from 10 to two hours, changing the meters on St. Joseph Street between Fifth and Sixth streets from two to four hours, changing the meters on Main Street between Fourth and Second streets from 10 to four hours and adding two-hour meters near the C/SAC on Sixth Street.

The main aspect of the downtown parking plan has remained the same. Two-hour meters on Main Street from Fourth to Ninth streets and on St. Joseph Street from Fifth to Ninth streets and on the streets between Main and St. Joe from Fifth to Ninth. Four-hour parking meters placed on the periphery of the two-hour meters with 10-hour meters placed beyond that. The two-hour meters will cost 50 cents per hour; four-hour and 10-hour meters will

cost 25 cents per hour. City officials hope it will encourage employees to park further away, leaving more room for downtown customers.

A proposed project for the downtown parking problem — the Rushmont Building was halted by developer Hani Shafai earlier in October. He came to the city with the idea in 2007.

The 15-story project, which would have provided downtown with 600 parking spots, retail store and office space and condominiums, was to be built on St. Joseph Street as part of a

public/private venture with the city.

But after Hanks asked Shafai to move ahead or notify the city he was halting the project, the developer sent a letter advising the mayor that the Rushmont was no longer on the drawing board.

In the letter, Shafai stated that due to the current economic environment, it would difficult to get the necessary financing. In addition, changes requested by the developer to the terms of the developer's agreement for tax increment financing between the city and the developer could not be reached.

Hanks said it was "regrettable that the Rushmont project will not become a reality for the downtown."

But, he noted, Rapid City has identified \$3.8 million for parking improvements in the downtown area and will be looking at other opportunities to provide the best solution for the parking issues facing the core downtown district. Hanks said he would consider a public-private partnership to create more parking for downtown. It's an old problem, he said, and new ideas are welcome.

